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How Cities Are Making Equity a Priority in the New Mobility Space

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Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and cities and states' issuance of stay-at-home orders, public transportation use has [fallen drastically](#) leaving city officials with [tough decisions](#) on how to best manage future transit operations.

[Some cities](#) have partnered with new mobility companies offering ridesharing, car sharing, ride hailing, and micromobility services—shared docked and dockless bicycles and electric scooters—to provide transportation to essential workers. Some have also [created more space in streets](#) for pedestrians, bicyclists, and scooter riders to use

How Cities Are Making Equity a Priority in the New Mobility Space

Even before the pandemic, many city leaders were working to integrate on-demand forms of transportation into their transportation systems. Through their responsive nature, new mobility technologies could increase transportation access for riders who lack reliable public transit options and reduce existing [transportation inequities](#). But without proper planning, new mobility could have the opposite effect.

To better understand how cities are assessing the potential of new mobility technologies, [we talked to transportation planners and new mobility companies](#) in medium-size cities about how they work together to promote equitable access to transportation. We learned how these partnerships function in potentially low-demand markets and use proactive procurement strategies to ensure equitable transportation outcomes for city residents. Three key themes emerged.

1. Transportation officials use flexible permitting and proposal processes to embed equity considerations into new technologies

Recognizing that companies are typically willing to negotiate when entering a new market, many cities use a request for proposal (RFP) or permitting process to codify equitable access requirements for companies. This process can help cities ensure new mobility technologies:

- are distributed across all neighborhoods
- have [payment options for residents without bank accounts or smartphones](#)
- are accessible for residents living with disabilities
- have discounted prices for residents with lower incomes
- are accompanied by outreach and multilingual informational material

When deciding whether to use an RFP or a permit, cities should consider factors such as the duration of the permit or license and how responsive they can be to changing requirements.

2. Cities and companies need to engage with residents during each step

Pilots can help cities learn more about the challenges they might experience working with and regulating companies. A pilot process also allows cities to engage with

Baltimore launched a six-month [dockless vehicle piloting phase](#), allowing any company to participate with the payment of a pilot fee. Through the pilot period, the city tested out different equity-based requests, such as bike and scooter distribution plans, and gathered public input through community meetings. Informed by the resulting [pilot evaluation report \(PDF\)](#), the city launched an annual permit program.

Effective community engagement through the pilot and beyond is critical to understanding public perceptions of new mobility technologies, residents' engagement with new mobility technologies, and barriers to access. Public outreach requires time, a dedicated budget, staff trained in community engagement, and organizational flexibility to respond to community needs.

Cities can involve new mobility companies in this process by requiring public engagement in their RFP or permitting process. Engagement could include [multilingual bike and scooter safety workshops](#) and campaigns, [demonstrations](#), and outreach at festivals and community events.

3. Planning organizations should craft transportation plans with equity as a goal

Cities and regions can also set equity as a goal in their planning processes. Communities in our study are incorporating new mobility technologies into long-range plans.

- In 2019, Akron, Ohio's new Office of Integrated Development launched a [five-year strategic framework](#) listing equity as a core value for planning and established a goal of a "more equitable Akron."
- In the [Regional Transportation Commission of Washoe County's 2050 transportation plan](#), the organization details plans for "promoting equity and environmental justice."
- In New York, the Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council's [Moving Forward 2050](#) outlines how micromobility and other noncar options can help the region increase mobility options for residents without personal vehicles.

The future of new mobility

To ensure that new mobility technologies are supporting transportation equity goals rather than exacerbating inequities, cities must build the capacity to be flexible, establish open lines of communication with companies, and engage the public throughout the decisionmaking process. Though the [viability of current new mobility companies is](#)

A woman wearing a mask rides a bike on the Brooklyn Bridge with the Manhattan skyline in the background amid the coronavirus pandemic on May 21, 2020 in New York City. (Photo by Alexi Rosenfeld/Getty Images)

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